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Ceremonial music of Japan

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CEREMONIAL MUSIC OF JAPAN

A Paper

Presented to
the Faculty of the Conservatory
College of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music
(The Requirements were Further Met
by a Public Concert in Piano
Presented 25 May 1954)

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ceremonial music in Japan is a type of music used to celebrate special occasions in special places, e.g., to honor the Emperor on his birthday, or for special celebrations at a shrine.

In Japanese, the character for ceremonial music is written 雅樂 (pronounced Gagaku). The character 雅 (ga) means graceful, noble, or excellent. The character 樂 (gaku) means good or beautiful musical sounds. Appearing together 雅樂 the two parts of this character mean ceremonial music, which is not performed among ordinary people.

In 602 A.D., the art of architecture was brought to Japan by a Buddhist nun from Kudara, which is a part of Korea. Along with the development of this art and the building of shrines, instrumental ensembles were developed in connection with dances for religious performances.

In 701 A.D. the government promulgated a law establishing a Ceremonial Music Department in the Emperor's Court. In that department there were four different types of ceremonial dances. Each had a special name, a certain type of music, a special class (and specified numbers) of people who participated in the special ceremonial dances. Today the original number of seventy-two participants has

been reduced to only thirty-five, but the ceremonials remain the same. In the early days, ceremonial music was combined with singing or dialogue, but this combination went out of use. Now, ceremonial music consists only of instrumental ensembles, with, occasionally, dances to go with them.

The body of ceremonial music today consists of about thirty pieces for instrumental ensemble only, plus about sixty more pieces which combine with dances. The literature was once much richer. There are about one hundred-eighty pieces which are known by name, but the actual music and its character have been lost.

The instruments used in ceremonial music are divided into strings, woodwinds, and percussion (especially drums). The people who may perform ceremonial music upon these instruments are descended from special aristocratic families. These families are in the service of the Department of Ceremonial Music, generation after generation, serving as instrumentalists and dancers at the Imperial Court. The performers are always male. Traditionally, women can never participate in ceremonial music, because of the concept of women's inferiority which has persisted since the birth of ceremonial music.

In shrines, the performers are chosen from among those in charge of the shrine, and are specially trained in the mastery of the required instruments.

The ceremonial music is used in the Imperial Court and in shrines, although not every shrine is equipped to perform ceremonial music. During the tenth and eleventh centuries it was used also in the homes of the highest class of military leaders. Today we find ceremonial music performed for the following occasions:

A. In the Imperial Court:

1. For the birthday of the Emperor
2. For the birthday of the Empress
3. For the birthdays of the Princes
4. For the birthdays of the Princesses
5. On January First
6. At the christening ceremony for Princes
or Princesses
7. For the coronation
8. At the investiture of the Crown Prince
9. At the marriage of Princes or Princesses
10. On the anniversary of the Emperor's marriage.
11. On the birthday of the Empress Dowager
12. For National Girls' Day (March Third)
13. For National Boys' Day (May Fifth)

B. In shrines:

1. In commemoration of establishment of the shrine

2. On the birthdays of the Gods of the Shrines

(Since the Japanese people worship the spirits of different outstanding personalities of ancient times, each shrine has a different deity. For example, the Kitano Shrine in Kyoto City is dedicated to Michizane Sugawara, the God of Learning, who was an outstanding scholar and poet of about three hundred years ago. On the twenty-fifth of each month, in honor of his birthday, a celebration takes place, with a particularly festive one on the twenty-fifth of February, which is his birthday.)

The basic philosophic implication of ceremonial music in Japan is virtue (morality). In respect to form, content, and thought, the ceremonial music is synthetic in character, which means it is part of a whole in which dance as action is equally as important as the music. In describing the history of ceremonial music, it is convenient to divide it into four periods. As indicated above, the first period extends from 602 A.D. to 701 A.D. During this period, with the development of the art of architecture, instrumental ensembles were gradually developed along with the dance. In 701 A.D. the government established the Ceremonial Music Department within the Department of the Imperial Household. There were four different types of ceremonial music in this department, and each had different teachers and students.

The system of the department and the number of people involved are described as follows:

The Department of Ceremonial Music was headed by

A President of the Ceremonial Music Department

A Vice-President of the Ceremonial Music Department

A Dean

An Assistant Dean

They governed the following groups:

	12 Teachers
<u>Togaku</u>	60 Students

(The pattern of this kind of music was originated in ancient To, middle province of Korea.)

	One Teacher of Technique
	20 Students
<u>Gogaku</u>	Two Drummers
	20 Performers
	Two Assistants

(The pattern of this music was originated in ancient Go of Korea.)

	30 Men Singers
	100 Students
	Four Teachers of Dance
<u>Wagaku</u>	100 Student Dancers

Two Teachers of Woodwind
 Six Students of Woodwind
 Eight Makers of Woodwinds

(This pattern is indigent to Japan.)

Four Koraigaku Teachers
 20 Koraigaku Students
 Four Kudaragaku Teachers
 20 Kudaragaku Students
 Four Shinragaku Teachers
 20 Shinragaku Students

Sankangaku

(The pattern of this music constitutes a mixture of all Korean influences.)¹

The instruments which were used in this period were similar to the strings, woodwinds, and percussion instruments of today. However, they were less highly perfected and needed a special technique to play which was difficult to master, so that the performers were considered to be very learned people.

The ceremonial music connected with Drama through a Dance which expressed Virtue. In this period, ceremonial music was influenced by both Chinese and Korean (Kudara) music and dances. Gradually, the Japanese people changed the form and music to suit their ethnic taste

¹Takashi Ito, Japanese Music History (Tokyo: Shinko Ongaku Book Company, 1934) p. 56.

and spirit. At the present time, many of the music patterns and dances which were used in ancient times are lost, so that now it is almost impossible to know the exact character of the music. (Compare page 2.)

By 908 A.D. ceremonial music bearing the influence of Chinese dance and Kudara music had grown so complicated that the Emperor instigated a reform, simplifying the forms of ceremonial music and reducing the number of people in the Ceremonial Music Department in the Imperial House.

<u>Togaku</u>	39 Musicians and Dancers
<u>Sankangaku</u>	38 Musicians and Dancers:
	26 Kudaragaku
	8 Koraigaku
	4 Shinragaku
<u>Wagaku</u>	62 Musicians and Dancers ²

During the third period, from 1000-1500, the staff for the ceremonial music at the Imperial Household was again drastically reduced, so much so that ceremonial music almost disappeared. This was a period of definite decline.

Four Dancers

Two Woodwind Performers

²Ibid., p. 59.

12 Karamusu Teachers
 Two Flute Teachers
 Four Koraimusu Teachers*
 Four Kudara Musu Teachers
 Two Shinragoku Teachers (Koto, Dance)**
 Two Teachers of Dance Technique

*Korai, small town in To (Korea)

**Shinra gaku, original Japanese music pattern³

Ceremonial music at the Court was so greatly diminished as to have its use confined to the occasions of real need. However, among the noble families of Kyoto, then the capital of Japan, many members cultivated it for their own enjoyment, practicing one or another of the instruments prescribed for ceremonial music. Yet, even in this form, it was practiced less and less as the country was torn by inner strife and civil war.

About the middle of the fourteenth century ceremonial music was disappearing from the Court ceremonials altogether. In 1359 one of the musicians of Kyoto anticipated the disappearance of ceremonial music. To save it from complete obliteration after his own death, he wrote about ceremonial music in a work comprising no less than

³Ibid., p. 66.

thirteen volumes and named Taigensha⁴. This Taigensha is one of the important sources of our knowledge of ceremonial music of that time. It helped to keep the interest alive and gradually to revive it again, when, around 1400, it was brought to the attention of the noble families. It was Emperor Ogimachi who, at that time, reassembled the surrounding ceremonial musicians and their descendants in Kyoto and vicinity, and reinstituted the Department of Ceremonial Music within the Imperial Household. The descendants of those musicians still serve in the department.

The main families:

<u>Kyoto District</u>	Ono, Toyohara, Obi, Yamai
<u>Nara District</u> *	Koma, Kami, Shiba, Oku, Tsuji, Kubo
<u>Tennoji District</u> **	Hata, Sona, Hayashi, Oka, Togi

*South of Kyoto

**West of Kyoto⁵

It is interesting to note that the general decline of ceremonial music of this third period, in which

⁴Hisao Tonobe, Japanese Music (Tokyo: Ongakunotomo Book Company, 1950) p. 82.

⁵Ibid., pp. 32, 38.

ceremonial music is said to have lost its soul and barely preserved its main form-patterns, was accompanied by an immense growth of folk music.

The fourth period, which began around 1500, extends to the present. An important date was around 1600, when the government established a Ceremonial Music Department at the Imperial Court in Tokyo, and still maintained a separate music department at Kyoto. Then began a period of great growth, and many masters of ceremonial music appeared. Much research was carried on, as is indicated by the many books about this type of music. The most outstanding of these are:

Gakukaroku 50 Volumes by Suehisa Abe

Gakudorui 30 Volumes by Akina Aba⁶

These books are the greatest systematic encyclopedia on ceremonial music in Japan.

Kabuhinmoku 10 Volumes by Morinaka Fuji-hara

This is a dictionary of the vocabularies which are used in the ceremonial music.

Ceremonial music is a synthesis of music, literature, and dance, reflecting Japanese life and expressing the national character so truly that it is almost impossible for foreigners to understand. Even the Japanese

⁶Ibid., pp. 42-43.

people have to be indoctrinated to understand this type of music. In certain cases where the original story of a dance or performance is lost and where only the outward pattern of motion to the music is preserved no one can truly understand the meaning of the melody of that particular piece. At the present time ceremonial music does not include singing, even though formerly singing was included. Since the ideas for dance-pantomimes of ceremonial music were invented by the most sensitive and refined minds, the texts to the songs were written by the greatest poets.

Ceremonial music numbers usually extend from thirty minutes to one hour and a half. In ceremonial music, drums hold a leading position. They hold the ensembles together almost in the manner of a conductor giving the pulse of the music, only the leadership of the drums is usually not obvious, and some times may be completely unobtrusive. In western music, usually the first beat is stronger than the second beat. In ceremonial and other Japanese music, it is the opposite, with the second beat usually stronger than the first beat.

Japanese music being a synthesis of literature, drama, dance, and music, it reveals the soul of the Japanese character, and therefore expresses the ideal of Japan-

ese Bushido of old days, which survived almost to the time of the last war. Bushido is not an idea which was borrowed from other countries. Rather, it was based on the ideals which the Japanese people had had from time immemorial, even though it was distorted later by the military leaders of Japan. After the Middle Ages, Buddhism from India and Confucianism from China influenced Shintoism and produced what is known as Japanese Bushido. Bushido is not to be considered comparable to the chivalry of Western knighthood. Although it contained elements of morality and religion, history has proved that it was a military concept used to influence the thinking and behavior of the people of Japan.

The concepts of Buddhism from India teach that this world is one of hardship and suffering. The main objective of Buddhists is to escape to the next world by training themselves to endure hardships while they are living in this world. The essentials of Chinese culture are synthetic. The life and purpose of the Chinese people emphasize human relationships in this world, without concern for the life hereafter, especially the Confucianists.

In Japan, the typical example of Bushido is as follows:

When a famous soldier, Masashige Kusunoki, was killed in battle, his last words were that he would be

reincarnated seven times and would be faithful to his master, the Emperor. This percept conceives of this world and the next as one. This is the essential philosophy of Japanese Bushido.

One of the authorities on Japanese music said that practicing ceremonial music is like practicing military arts. In essence, the musician acts like a soldier. He requires the application of all of his strength to the discipline of his very breath and the greatest attention must be given to the sense of timing which allows for not the slightest negligence. As in fencing, where the most fleeting lack of concentration may result in one's death, the most minute lack of attention is deadly to the spirit of ceremonial music. It can never be performed in a merely mechanical manner. It requires all of one's soul and a state of selflessness.

Once a flute player and a drummer had an argument and separated. The court nobleman who was their sponsor regretted this incident and one day he asked them to meet in an auditorium and perform together. At that time both of them had resolved to settle their differences by means of a serious musical "bout." Their tense feelings matched each other, so their performances were excellent. From

that time on, both of them respected one another and became good friends again.

II. THE TONAL SYSTEM OF CEREMONIAL MUSIC

Ceremonial music is built on the five-tone scale.

This scale resembles the intervals of the scale: Do, Re, Mi, Sol, La. The Japanese names for these five scale tones are: Kyu, Sho, Kaku, Chi, and U. On the half-step lower than Chi, there is Hen-Chi and on the half-step lower than Kyu, there is Hen-Kyu. Therefore, this five-tone scale can, by additions, become a seven-tone scale.

In one takes Kyu as the key of "C", the seven-tone scale is:

C	Kyu
D	Sho
E	Kaku
G-flat (F-sharp)	Hen-Chi
G	Chi
A	U
C-flat (B)	Hen-Kyu
C	Kyu

This scale is called Ryosen.

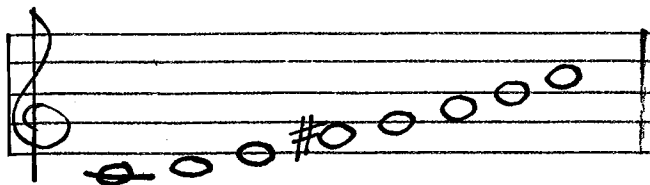


Figure 1. Ryosen Scale

There is one other scale. This is called Ritsusen, and in this scale, on the half-step above Sho, there is Eisho. There is no Hen-Chi nor Hen-Kyu, but on the half-step above U there is Eiu. This seven-tone scale, Ritsusen, using the key of "C" for Kyu, is:

C	Kyu
D	Sho
D-sharp (E-flat)	Eisho
F	Kaku
G	Chi
A	U
A-sharp (B-flat)	Eiu
C	Kyu

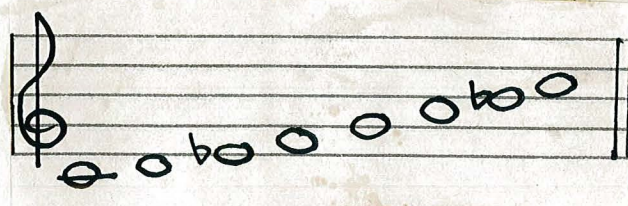


Figure 2. Ritsusen Scale

Tone names are given to the twelve semitones, called the twelve ritsu. The basic tone is called Ichikotsu, and this is almost the same as the pitch of "D". The tones and their names are, then:

D	Ichikotsu
D-sharp	Tangin

E	Hyojo
F	Shozetsu
F-sharp	Shimomu
G	Sojo
G-sharp	Fusho
A	Ojiki
A-sharp	Rankei
B	Banshiki
C	Shinsen
C-sharp	Kamimu ⁷

All twelve of the Ritsu may not be used as the basic tones of both scales. Ryosen can be built on the Ichikotsu, Sojo, and Kyojo Ritsu only. Ritsusen can be built on the Hyojo, Ojiki, and Banshiki only. These six tonalities are called the six tonalities of ceremonial music.

⁷Takashi Ito, op. cit., p. 73.

III. INSTRUMENTATION AND NOTATION OF CEREMONIAL MUSIC

The instruments which are used in ceremonial music are:

Strings: ^{So}~~Sho~~ (Wagoto, Gokusho), Biwa

Woodwinds: Flute (Wabue, Yokobue, Koraibue), ~~Sho~~^{Sho}

Percussion: Drum, Sanki, Shoki, Kanki

The instruments are divided into two sections, a left-hand side and a right-hand side. The left side of the strings is ~~Sho~~^{So}; the right side is Biwa. The left side of the woodwinds is Wobue, Yokobue, and ~~Sho~~^{Sho}; the right side is Koraibue. The left side of percussion instruments is composed of Drums and Sanki; the right side is Shoki and Kanki. To illustrate one of these instruments, a Biwa is pictured below.

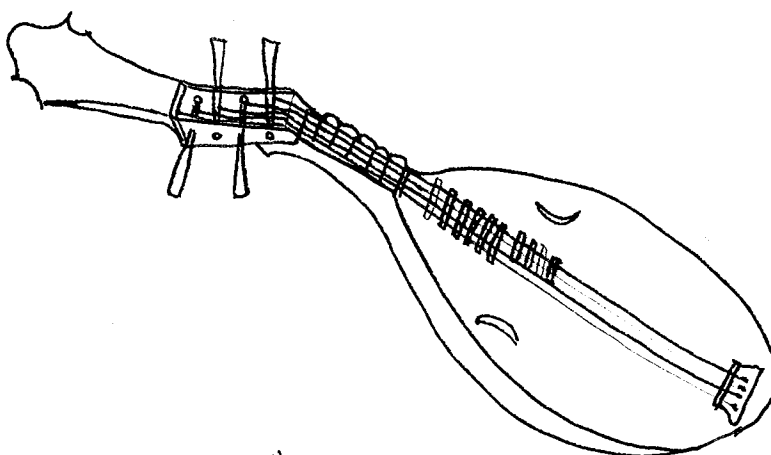


Figure 3. Biwa⁸

⁸Ryoichi Taki, The History of Oriental Music (Tokyo: Zenon Gokufu Book Company, 1953) p. 175.

The Japanese National Anthem, "Kimigayo", serves as a simple example of ceremonial music. This composition is written in Ichikotsu tonality.



Figure 4. "Kimigayo"

The meaning of the text of this Japanese National Anthem is:

"Our nation hopes that the reign of the Emperor will be so long that a piece of sand becomes a big rock and grow mosses on it."

IV. CEREMONIAL VERSUS WESTERN MUSIC

At the present time Western music has displaced almost all original Japanese music. The reasons for this are:

- A. Young people are fascinated by its brilliancy. It offers them many possibilities for full expression.
- B. The sounds of ceremonial or other Japanese music are rather dark and sentimental, so this Japanese music is performed only among old people, who alone can understand and appreciate it.
- C. Performances of many excellent musicians have contributed to the acceptance of Western music.
- D. The development of the phonograph has contributed to the popularity of Western music all over Japan.
- E. Christianity, which became influential in Japan about one hundred years ago, used Western music exclusively.
- F. After the First and Second World Wars, it became even more prominent, so that at the present time in Japan the term music (Ongeku: 音楽) means Western music, not ceremonial or other Japanese music.

All original Japanese music has not been lost, however. The Second World War brought about a rebirth of Nationalism which fostered a renewal of interest in ceremonial and other Japanese music among the people. This has led contemporary Japanese composers to draw on ceremonial or other Japanese music for thematic material for use in compositions in the Western idiom.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be said that Japanese national spirit is revealed in the performance of ceremonial music; the dark, sentimental, and simple character of Japanese music does not appeal to modern young Japanese people who prefer the brilliant, complicated, and expressive Western music. Japanese ceremonial music does, however, contribute to current compositions, and when it becomes a motif in the Western idiom, it assumes a freshness and novelty which make it acceptable to the younger generation of Japanese.

A good subject for further research might be the displacement of ceremonial and other Japanese music by the Western type of music.

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